

## **Evolution of Office of Strategic Services**

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President Franklin Delano Roosevelt (FDR) established the Office of Coordinator of Information (COI) in July 1941, an intelligence gathering agency and the predecessor of the Office of Strategic Services (OSS). FDR chose William "Wild Bill" Donovan as the COI director. Donovan was empathetic to FDR's vision of America's role in the world and had a similar temperament as the President's.

On June 11, 1942, FDR ordered the dissolution of the COI and the establishment of the OSS. This new organization embodied Donovan's vision of a joint special operations capability. But it was not until late December 1942 that the Joint Chiefs of Staff, suspicious of Donovan and special operations, finally approved the OSS. This very deliberate approval process foreshadowed some of the same challenges the United States Special Operations Command had to overcome after its establishment on April 16, 1987.

The OSS was responsible for Psychological Operations, research, intelligence, counter-intelligence, and unconventional warfare. Donovan understood the importance and close interrelationship of psychological warfare and unconventional warfare. The first phase in operations against an enemy would be "intelligence penetration," the gathering of information to be used for strategic planning and propaganda. Next would be special operations, such as sabotage and subversion, followed by commando raids, guerrilla actions and behind-the-lines resistance movements. Donovan's visionary dream was to unify these functions in support of conventional forces, thereby forging a "new instrument of war."

The OSS conducted operations around the globe. In the European theater, OSS Jedburgh teams parachuted in behind enemy lines, contacted resistance groups, equipped them with weapons and supplies, engaged in hit and run tactics, and established security and intelligence networks. OSS Operational Groups, made up of volunteers who were "willing to undertake unusual and dangerous risk," conducted operations in North Africa, France, Italy, and the Balkans. Most of the men spoke the language of the country in which they were to operate, and all were specialists in demolitions, special weapons, scouting, and survival. Donovan became known as the Allied guerrilla supremo to the Yugoslavian and Greek resistance movements. In the Pacific, Detachment 101 conducted unconventional warfare behind Japanese lines in Burma.

Donovan's OSS is the spiritual precursor to USSOCOM. Today's Special Operation Forces continue to play a center stage role in Afghanistan and Iraq proudly trace their roots back to the OSS and the vision of one man, "Wild Bill" Donovan. Today's SOF warriors successfully used many of the same tactics and techniques first employed over a half century earlier by the OSS. Like Donovan's OSS, USSOCOM has the unique opportunity to conduct a variety of missions spanning the conflict spectrum.



**Original members of the OSS Jedburgh teams.**